



# CATAWBA COUNTY

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**Department of Social Services**

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Department of Human Resource's summer "Mentoring Group" a success**

The transition from elementary school to middle school is frequently a difficult one characterized by fear and apprehension, as well as some excitement. The Department of Human Resource (DHR) social workers at Family NET, a division of Catawba County Social Services, used their skills and creativity to help rising middle-school students get some well-needed mentoring from some older students who were recently in their shoes.

This past summer, in a new initiative, DHR social workers Renee Bridges, Pam Kidwell and Jennifer Hostetler organized and guided a "mentoring group" which matched five 8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> grade girls with seven rising 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls to mentor, advise, learn and have fun. Each of these twelve girls have participated in TEEN UP and/or DHR school-based services, which are prevention services offered through Social Services to assist students with overcoming barriers to academic success.

The Mentoring Group met for 8 hours a day on Mondays and Wednesdays for the month of June. Transportation was provided for all students. Each meeting started with aerobic exercises, and the main focus of the group was on healthy living, community service, peer pressure issues, relationships, family, future goal setting and making good choices in life. On Mondays, Faye Cook, member of the Public Health school nursing team, taught a healthy living class that dealt with the issues of healthy eating, hygiene, stress management and female health.

Scrapbooking became a favorite activity for many of the girls. With the help of Pam Starnes, a Creative Memories scrapbook consultant, the girls were able to express their creativity while sharing their life experiences with each other. Mayra, a 9<sup>th</sup> grader at Hickory High, said, "I could stay here all day working on scrapbooks. It is so peaceful." The experience of teaching scrapbooking to the group members also had a resounding impact on Starnes: "This was one of the most enriching, encouraging, heart-warming and inspiring events I've ever had in my workshop. The girls who attended were well behaved and heart breakers at the same time. I fell in love with each of them immediately – it was impossible not to. I was sad to see the program end, knowing I might never see these girls again. I would gladly host this program again. My life is richer for the experience and hopefully theirs are too."

The girls performed community service outreach with Habitat for Humanity in the Ridgeview area. Their volunteer work included fixing a healthy lunch for other volunteers that were working on the construction site. This project was especially meaningful to one group member whose family will soon be purchasing a Habitat home on this site.

Throughout the duration of the group, the DHR co-facilitators guided the older students and helped them mentor the younger girls. This proved to be as much of a positive experience for the older girls as it was for the girls they were mentoring. “It felt good when I found out that they (the younger girls) looked up to me and wanted to spend time with me,” said Brittany, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade mentor. Her classmate, Kayla, had a similar experience, “It felt good to help younger girls make positive decisions. I had fun too.”

Field trips and discussions helped the girls start thinking about their future aspirations. Tours of Catawba Valley Community College and the Cosmetic Arts Academy helped them learn about different career opportunities. Other field trips included Pin Station, Carmike Cinemas and the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad. After an entire month of fun and companionship, Lakendra, a rising 6<sup>th</sup> grader, only had one complaint, “I wish it would have lasted longer. I loved it.”

For more information, please contact Renee Bridges, Family NET DHR Social Worker, at (828) 267-6012.